

**MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN LINGUISTICS, UNIVERSITY
OF KELANIYA**

**EFFECT OF SEMANTIC NOTIONS IN SECOND LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION OF THE ENGLISH ARTICLE SYSTEM**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the second language acquisition of the English article system by Sinhalese learners in order to find out the role of certain semantic universals of the Universal Grammar during the acquisition process. More specifically, the purpose is to see whether or not L1 Sinhalese learners of English fluctuate between two semantic notions namely; specificity and definiteness, and the effect of this fluctuation on acquisition.

120 students from three groups of learners at different proficiency levels (40 elementary, 40 intermediate and 40 upper –intermediate students) were tested. Data collection instrument, a forced-choice elicitation task is used. The task consists of 40 short and contextualized dialogues. The target sentence in each dialogue is missing an article and learners were asked to fill the gap with an appropriate article; a/an, the or Ø on the bases of their understanding of the proceeding context. Dialogues in the task belong to four different contexts; i.e. definite/specific, definite/non-specific, indefinite/specific and indefinite/non-specific. Each context has 10 dialogues with four different contexts that are randomized. Data were analyzed using SPSS 17 packet program (descriptive analysis and one-way ANOVA).

The results showed that intermediate level learners exhibited fluctuation between definiteness and specificity to a great extent in (+definite/-specific) and (-definite/+specific) contexts. Elementary level learners were more accurate in these contexts exhibiting article omission errors in definite contexts. Overall, despite certain unexpected results, upper intermediate level students were quite successful in article assignment in defined contexts.

This revealed that there is a positive correlation between article system acquisition and proficiency.

Keywords: language acquisition, article system, specificity, definiteness, Universal Grammar, semantic notions, fluctuation, proficiency level.